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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 ADDIS ABABA 002285

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, AND INR/AA
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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: (C-AL7-01035) ETHIOPIA: UN AGENCIES ALLEGE
DISPLACEMENT AND ABUSES IN OGADEN; GOE TO ALLOW EMERGENCY
FOOD DELIVERIES

REF: A. STATE 88346 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 2196 (AND PREVIOUS)
[1](#)C. ADDIS ABABA 2027

Classified By: ERIC WONG, ACTING DCM. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs report that Somali Region authorities have decided to allow the delivery of emergency food relief--presumably under military escort--to 5 zones in the Ogaden where military operations are ongoing. However, the UN and NGOs also note that the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) continues to restrict and to seize commercial or private food deliveries to the Ogaden, aiming to cripple the insurgents of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). To avert a future humanitarian crisis, UNOCHA highlights the need to allow commercial food deliveries, not just deliveries of emergency food relief, to resume. NGOs operating in the Ogaden report firsthand accounts of "abandoned villages"; up to 40 percent of those presenting themselves to a newly established UNHCR camp near Jijiga are local IDPs (not refugees from Somalia), presumably from the Ogaden. NGOs report individual incidents of killings and rapes of villagers by the military, but due to their scale and lack of detailed information, it is difficult to determine whether such incidents reflect a systematic policy. NGOs report houses burnt by both the military and the ONLF; as well as increased placement of landmines, possibly by the ONLF, to target ENDF military vehicles--currently the only vehicles (apart from those of international NGOs) traveling in the Ogaden. In a separate meeting, former Somali Region officials assert that 10,000 ENDF troops are combating up to 13,000 ONLF fighters, and that the ONLF would support dialogue with the GOE, facilitated by the United States. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On July 19, A/DCM, REFCOORD Pickering Fellow, USAID and OFDA officers attended a meeting hosted by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) on the current humanitarian situation in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Region. Representatives of UN humanitarian agencies, NGOs operating in the Ogaden, and key donors also participated.

EMERGENCY FOOD TO BE ALLOWED, BUT COMMERCIAL FOOD BLOCKED

13. (SBU) UNOCHA Head of Office and Deputy to the Humanitarian Coordinator, Paul Hebert, announced that the Somali Region government had decided July 17 to allow (emergency) food distribution into the 5 zones (i.e., Degehabur, Fik, Gode, Korahe, and Warder) where military operations were ongoing. Regional officials would meet over the next few days in Jijiga (Somali Region's capital); UNOCHA hoped they would allow the resumption of emergency food by the federal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA), the regional-level Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (DPPB), and the World Food Program (WFP) to some 530,000 beneficiaries identified in March 2007. UNOCHA expressed concern about a recommendation, before the Somali Regional Parliament, that in 25-28 woredas (half of those in the Somali Region), funds earmarked for development assistance would be transferred to peace and security.

-- FOOD DISTRIBUTED OUTSIDE OGADEN: According to Hebert, food was already being distributed in zones outside the conflict area (e.g., Liben, Afder, and Shinile). (NOTE: The Somali Region is comprised of 9 zones. Jijiga is thus considered outside the area of current military operations, but food distribution is not/not ongoing there. END NOTE.) Hebert denied that distribution would only be in large towns, not rural areas, noting that, normally, emergency food was distributed to 180 distribution points throughout the Somali Region. Typically, prior to delivery, DPPA and DPPB officials required a food aid recipient to submit signatures of 10 beneficiaries, Hebert said.

-- MECHANISM FOR DISTRIBUTION AT ISSUE: UNOCHA assumes that emergency food delivery would be by convoy with military

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escort, which has been suggested by the GOE but not yet formally proposed. Following a meeting the previous week with UN officials, Deputy Prime Minister Addisu Legesse had instructed that emergency food at Nazret (near Addis Ababa) be loaded onto trucks for distribution; the issue now was the mechanism for distribution in conflict zones. Jijiga-based UNDP representative Heinz Freyer reported that the GOE had published three lists of transporters: transporters who could be hired; transporters who remained under investigation; and a third group the GOE alleged were "proven collaborators" of Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) rebels. Transporters in the third group had been detained and were being held in military camps, not jails, outside Jijiga, Freyer reported.

-- COMMERCIAL DELIVERIES REMAIN BLOCKED: Despite the agreement to allow distribution of emergency food, Hebert said, the "unofficial embargo" on private and commercial food deliveries to the 5 conflict zones continued: while some commercial traffic had entered Korahe and Gode Zones, prices had increased by 100-200 percent (since May) in all 5 zones. While private vehicles could travel between Jijiga and Degehabur, any food in vehicles was confiscated at checkpoints. Hebert and Medecins Sans Frontiers reported that in Fik, even food on donkeys was being confiscated, as the intent was to deny the ONLF food. The restriction on food had pushed communities' coping mechanisms to the limit, Hebert said, with safety the primary concern for most residents.

14. (SBU) NGOs operating in the Ogaden echoed UNOCHA's concerns about food insecurity:

-- Medecins Sans Frontiers-Holland (Doctors Without Borders) representative Will Robertson said MSF remained concerned about food insecurity in the Somali Region; food was being used for "peace and security," rather than targeting the most vulnerable. (NOTE: As detailed in ref C, MSF-Holland operates health facilities in Warder. END NOTE.)
-- Oxfam (UK) Country Program Manager Mandy Woodhouse asserted that GOE security forces had implemented "a deliberate policy of starvation," and reported that youths faced harassment and arrest (to determine whether they were

affiliated with insurgents).

¶5. (SBU) Although outside the 5 conflict zones, Jijiga was nevertheless "definitely suffering," according to UNDP representative Freyer. He cited dramatic price increases in prices of food staples (e.g., the price for 25kg of rice had risen 45 percent over the last week, from 240 to 350 birr; the price of sugar had doubled, from 350 to 800 birr; the price of milk powder had quadrupled).

IDPS ABANDONING OGADEN; DISEASE, MALNUTRITION ARE CONCERNS

¶6. (SBU) A "significant and sizable number" of the local population faced humanitarian risk, UNOCHA Head of Office Hebert asserted. He cited reports of "large numbers" of internally displaced --corroborated by observations of empty and half-empty villages, and of people moving into the bush. Some people had been "forcibly moved" by the military, he said. Assessment teams (presumably for food insecurity) had been permitted to enter the 5 conflict zones, but were not specifically mandated to examine displacement. The government was "orchestrating concentrations" of people, and would likely seek delivery of food to them, not to the most vulnerable, Hebert commented. Hebert acknowledged that it was unclear whether individual commanders were acting on their own, or implementing policies condoned by officials.

¶7. (SBU) Medecins Sans Frontieres-Belgium Director of Operations Meinie Nicolai reported that her MSF-Belgium team had traveled 770km from Gode to Fik to Degehabur Zones (i.e., 3 of the 5 zones where military operations were ongoing), and had seen "half-empty villages." Markets were devoid of food items except sugar (50kg of sugar cost 800 birr, or approximately 90 USD). Over a 5-day period of travel, the MSF team had seen no vehicular traffic, with the exception of a single truck from the water bureau. A 10-truck convoy had

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been allowed to enter Fik, but transport of food out of Fik was not allowed. People were subsisting on milk, tea, and "some bush products." The team had briefed the Somali Region health bureau in Jijiga, Nicolai added.

-- In a separate meeting with Ambassador and poloffs on July 20, Nicolai said that a rapid nutritional assessment of 300 children had found more than 10 percent "at risk". The 2000 drought in the Ogaden had shown that once severe malnutrition had occurred, high mortality rapidly ensued, she said, urging action to preempt further deterioration. While a nutritional crisis did not exist now, lack of action could lead to one in the future.

¶8. (SBU) While the GOE was acknowledging and registering refugees (from Somalia) in Jijiga Zone (i.e., northern Somali Region), UNHCR was denied access to areas in the more southern Gode Zone:

-- Gode-based UNHCR Emergency Coordinator Ron Mponda reported the establishment on July 15 of a new refugee camp near Hareshen (Jijiga Zone) for an anticipated 3,000 refugees (from Somalia) being jointly registered by UNHCR and the GOE.

The camp had a 60 percent approval rate; the 40 percent denied refugee status were primarily local residents seeking entry to the camp, UNHCR said. Jijiga-based UNDP representative Freyer reported that internally displaced people whom UNHCR had refused to accept as refugees were remaining in Jijiga. There had also been reports of population movements from the zones in the Ogaden, where military operations were ongoing, to neighboring Puntland and Somalia.

-- In Gode Zone, UNHCR had been denied access to Kelafo, Mustahil, and Ferfer woredas (bordering Somalia), as the GOE denied the presence of any refugees in the area, Mponda said.

UNHCR was therefore focusing on community-based interventions, including conducting targeted food aid.

-- WFP representative expressed concern about refugees in Afder and Kelafo, and noted that WFP teams would visit Warder, Gode, and Korahe later in the week.

¶9. (SBU) UN agencies highlighted concerns about acute watery diarrhea (AWD, or cholera) in the Ogaden:

-- UNOCHA reported that whereas all 5 zones in the Ogaden had previously reported AWD, there had now been no reports from the interior of the Ogaden for the last two months. Fik Zone had reported deaths from AWD, not lack of food. Jijiga had also reported AWD.

-- WHO representative reported that 29 districts and Jijiga had been affected by AWD; however, WHO was in contact with health officials only in Jijiga. The only information on AWD had come from NGOs; the regional health bureau had reported nothing.

-- UNICEF noted that its Expanded Outreach Strategy (EOS) activities had to be suspended, due to the current situation in the Ogaden, and that the GOE had declared that it was not ready to have them resume.

"INDISCRIMINATE KILLINGS", RAPES ALLEGED

¶10. (SBU) UNDP representative Freyer asserted that the ENDF was "indiscriminately killing civilians." He cited several incidents in Degahabur Zone (situated between Jijiga and Fik Zones), including: the military's alleged killing of 22 guests at a wedding party at Degehabur woreda; the ENDF's alleged killing of another 18 individuals at a village near Debehamedo; and the death of a man allegedly run off the road by a military convoy.

¶11. (SBU) Oxfam (UK) Country Program Manager Woodhouse, whose NGO operated on the edges of Jijiga Zone, expressed concern about "many" reports of rape by those traveling out of the Ogaden area, but had no additional information on the issue.

¶12. (SBU) ICRC representative said ICRC would maintain a "discrete and confidential" dialogue with authorities, and underscored the sensitive nature of information on human rights and humanitarian conditions in the Ogaden. Publicly

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releasing information could jeopardize the safety and security of ICRC teams currently in the field, he said.

LANDMINES HAVE KILLED 12

¶13. (SBU) UN agencies and NGOs expressed concern about increased landmine incidents since July 12:

-- Landmines had caused a total of 12 deaths recently. Oxfam (UK) Manager Woodhouse cited landmine incidents between Warder and Shilabo (i.e., between Warder and Korahe Zones) on July 12, and in Degehabur on July 15. UNDP representative Freyer reported 4 killed and 2 injured in a July 16 incident.

-- The area between Degahabur and Degehamedo woredas was a definite "no-go" area, Freyer said, asserting that landmines obstructed vehicular traffic. It was unclear who had placed the landmines: all had been on the main road, easily placed in loose soil. Citing reports of increased activity by al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) and the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) in those areas, Freyer said either the ONLF or those groups could have been responsible for the landmines.

PRESENCE OF UN AGENCY OFFICIALS MAY DETER ABUSES

¶14. (SBU) UNOCHA Head of Office Hebert said that UNOCHA had not had direct discussions with the Ethiopian military; he

hoped to travel to Jijiga in the following week to meet with regional government officials. The UN Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator would also travel to the region. Citing UN agencies' "self-imposed" travel restrictions, perhaps proper pre-notification could allow travel by UN representatives to the Somali Region, as the presence of UN agencies was likely the most effective deterrent to activities adversely affecting the population.

-- Humanitarian NGOs confirmed UNOCHA's assertion that NGOs were now allowed to move freely in the Somali Region. ICRC noted the requirement to provide 3 days advance notice to the Ethiopian military's central command in Harar, prior to movement. MSF-Belgium's team had been able to travel through 3 conflict zones, after informing the ENDF commander in Gode that they were conducting a nutritional assessment, and presenting themselves to local military commanders at each local woreda.

-- UNDP representative Freyer said police had established checkpoints at night in Jijiga; ethnic Somali UN staff were being asked their clan, and faced a high risk of arrest. In Degehabur Zone, security operations had disrupted implementation of the UN Human Security initiative, as ENDF troops occupied "all physical infrastructure," (i.e., health and veterinary posts, primary schools, etc.).

MSF REPORTS ALLEGED KILLINGS, BEATINGS, OF OGADENI VILLAGERS

¶15. (C) In a separate meeting with Ambassador and poloffs on July 20, MSF representatives (STRICTLY PROTECT) reiterated concerns about denial of food, abandoned villages, attacks on villagers, and landmines:

-- MSF had seen abandoned villages in Gode, Fik, and Degehabur Zones, but no IDP movements, as the movement of civilians was restricted. A village of 1,500 had been reduced to 500 inhabitants, with only elderly and those lacking livestock remaining. The MSF vehicles entering these areas were the only non-military vehicles that reportedly entered within the last two months. In these areas, an MSF nurse reported personally treating 2 youths whose arms were allegedly broken by Ethiopian troops. One woman claimed to be a victim of rape by an Amharic-speaking soldier (presumably ENDF). Elders in another village reported 23 rapes in the last six months, attributable to the military;

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"every time they come, they rape," elders had reportedly stated. In one village, ENDF troops had reportedly surrounded the town, and then "tortured" 4 villagers. In Degahabur, ENDF troops had reportedly killed 35 villagers in 2 towns (allegedly including 6 women and 4 children), after villagers had resisted the military's seizure of camels. In one village, some 37 residents had disappeared (some from previous counterinsurgency campaigns); while some were known to be in detention, the fate of others was unknown. On the other hand, the ONLF had reportedly burnt some houses of suspected collaborators with the ENDF.

-- MSF officials traveling north from Warder to Aware (in Degehabur Zone), had driven through numerous villages: each village reported 2-3 killed by the ENDF, and up to 7 rapes (out of populations of several hundred). The MSF official reported seeing two burnt villages near Warder, and 5 "displaced" (i.e., abandoned) villages; some 40 out of 47 houses had been burnt in one village. MSF representatives expressed concern about areas northwest of Warder, as well as south of Warder, where they had been denied access.

-- MSF had encountered victims of beatings who asserted that the military had attacked them in retaliation for suspected support of the ONLF. Such beatings occurred following ONLF attacks on the ENDF.

-- Food was being manipulated by authorities, with food promised to villages only if they provided fighters against the ONLF. Food was a "collective punishment," and the blockage of food was "systematic." Commercial trucks from Somalia delivered food directly to ENDF military compounds; nothing went to local markets. Gode, as a large town with a population of 70,000, had more food reserves, and therefore was not as affected. In Fik, ENDF troops seized food from a convoy and threw it on the ground. The counterinsurgency created resentment of the GOE, as villagers blamed the GOE for blocking vehicles and food, MSF said.

-- MSF representatives said that the ONLF had established a large military camp in Gerbo (Fik Zone); at least one ENDF helicopter was operating there. Prisons were all in military garrison towns, within military compounds, outside of civilian control.

¶16. (C) MSF representatives said that the ONLF had reportedly attacked a village to obtain food; in contrast to most residents, ONLF fighters were "well-armed, well-fed, and pissed off." Most Ogadeni men aged 15-60 had fled to the bush, leaving only a token presence to defend their women and children. MSF reported that Ogadeni elders rejected more militant movements (likely UWSLF and AIAI), as they were not ethnic Ogadeni. The only presence of foreigners was reportedly the influx of 1,800 Somalis from Somalia when the GOE pushed villages in the Ogaden to produce fighters as conscripts.

¶17. (C) MSF assessed that landmines were directed against ENDF military vehicles, as they were the only vehicles now on the road, and were primarily command-detonated, as they had reportedly been in 2000. The ONLF primarily engaged in hit-and-run attacks, quickly withdrawing following brief engagements. More prolonged military engagements between the ONLF and ENDF reportedly occurred in Shilabo (Korahe Zone).

FORMER SOMALI REGIONAL OFFICIALS COMMENT ON ONLF

¶18. (C) In a separate meeting on July 19 with Ambassador and poloff, two former officials of the transitional government (ousted in 1995) confirmed the blockage of food deliveries and reported on the scope of the current counterinsurgency:

-- Bouh Houssien Omar, Vice Chairman of the Somali Democratic Alliance Forces, from Dire Dawa; and Dr. Ahmed Nazir, from Gode, reported an estimated 10,000 ENDF troops in the Somali Region, opposing an estimated 13,000-15,000 ONLF fighters. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was assisting the ONLF; Omar

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and Nazir had no information on foreign insurgents.

-- Mass detentions were reported in Jijiga; detainees were held in military camp(s) in Jijiga.

-- The ONLF was responsible for a landmine attack in Degehabur, which had killed 6 of 16 Ogadeni elders; the placement of landmines was occurring throughout the Somali Region.

-- Current Somali Region MPs were primarily illiterate and lacked popular support. There was support within the ONLF for dialogue with the GOE, facilitated by the United States.

¶19. (C) COMMENT. The approval of the resumption of humanitarian food deliveries is a significant step forward, but NGOs and UN agencies alike underscore the greater economic importance of allowing the resumption of commercial food deliveries, particularly to a pastoralist population preparing for the future rainy season. NGOs allowed to travel and operate in the Ogaden area are primarily those with mandates to provide humanitarian relief, such as nutritional assistance, health services, or monitoring of food insecurity. Thus, information on food insecurity and

rising commodity prices is more consistent than information on alleged human rights abuses. For example, MSF-Holland's determination that a half-empty village in Warder Zone has been "displaced," while MSF-Belgium identifies empty villages in Fik or Degehabur as "abandoned", is based on villagers having stated that they moved due to "insecurity," rather than starvation. Such NGOs are not/not currently able to confirm reports of either systematic displacement of civilian populations by the military, or of the establishment of cantonment camps. Similarly, while UNDP reports alleged incidents of up to several dozen villagers killed by the ENDF, and NGOs report up to 7 rapes in a single village, lack of additional information about motives, scale, or intent render it difficult to conclude that these despicable actions result from a deliberate or systematic policy. Nevertheless, such reports are extremely disturbing, and merit further investigation. Post continues to raise concerns about the ongoing humanitarian situation in the Ogaden with senior GOE officials, and to obtain more credible information on alleged human rights abuses. END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO